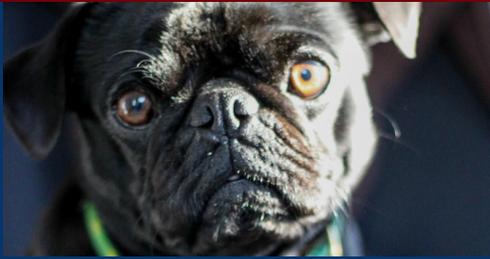


# REMOVING BREED LABELS

CO-AUTHORED BY KRISTEN AUERBACH



SEE WHAT SCIENCE SAYS ABOUT THEIR ACCURACY AND HOW THEY IMPACT PEOPLE AND PETS

ANIMALFARMFOUNDATION.ORG



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For the individual owner, playing the 'breed id game' is another way to bond with their pet. Trying to guess the various combinations that might make up their dog's unique genetic mix is a lot of fun. There are even DNA tests that give a snapshot of this information.

Guessing at breeds is a far more serious issue for animal welfare professionals.

Thanks to years of academic research, we know that visual identification of dog breeds is highly inaccurate.

A study by Victoria L Voith PhD, DVM, DACVB found that the breed labels shelter staff assigned to shelter dogs were wrong at least 75% of the time. 



# AN INTRODUCTION ON WHY BREED LABEL GUESSWORK DOESN'T WORK



The vast majority of dogs in shelters are of mixed breed heritage, unique concoctions of two or more breeds.

Whether or not a breed label accurately reflects a dog's genetic makeup doesn't really matter when it comes to helping match dogs with potential adopters.

Dogs are complex individuals whose behavior is influenced by many internal and external factors.

This is why Animal Farm Foundation views all dogs, regardless of whether they're 'pure,' 'mixed' breed, or of unknown origin, as individuals.

To access this book's interactive features, click on this symbol  when it appears throughout the book



# CHANGE IS HAPPENING . . .

Despite the fact that most dogs in shelters are mixed breeds of unknown origin and the scientific evidence about the inaccuracy and negative impact of breed labels, shelters still assign subjective breed labels to their dogs.

Based on those labels, people speculate about how a dog will behave and make decisions about which dogs are suitable for adoption into certain homes.

This leads to poor matches for adopters because it is in no way indicative of a dog's energy levels, temperament, etc...

But change is happening.

"BASED ON THOSE LABELS, PEOPLE SPECULATE ABOUT HOW A DOG WILL BEHAVE AND MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT WHICH DOGS ARE SUITABLE FOR ADOPTION INTO CERTAIN HOMES."

In order to provide more accurate information about shelter dogs and to ensure better matches with adopters, many shelters around the country are opting to remove breed labels from their kennel cards and software databases.

Shelters that make this choice discover a multitude of benefits, including better matches between dogs and families, more adoptions and a shorter length of stay for medium and large dogs.



In 2008, Dr. Amy Marder wrote:

“INSTEAD OF  
DEPENDING ON  
INACCURATE BREED  
LABELS, WE WANT  
PEOPLE TO CHOOSE  
THEIR FUTURE  
COMPANIONS BASED ON  
ACCURATE  
PERSONALITY  
PROFILES.”

She introduced the idea of using the term  **“American Shelter Dog”** in place of a breed label because:

“THE PROBLEM IS BREED  
IDENTITY ELICITS  
BEHAVIORAL  
EXPECTATIONS ON THE  
PART OF THE NEW  
OWNER, EVEN THOUGH  
RESEARCHERS HAVE  
FOUND ENORMOUS  
BEHAVIORAL  
VARIABILITY WITHIN  
ALL BREEDS.”

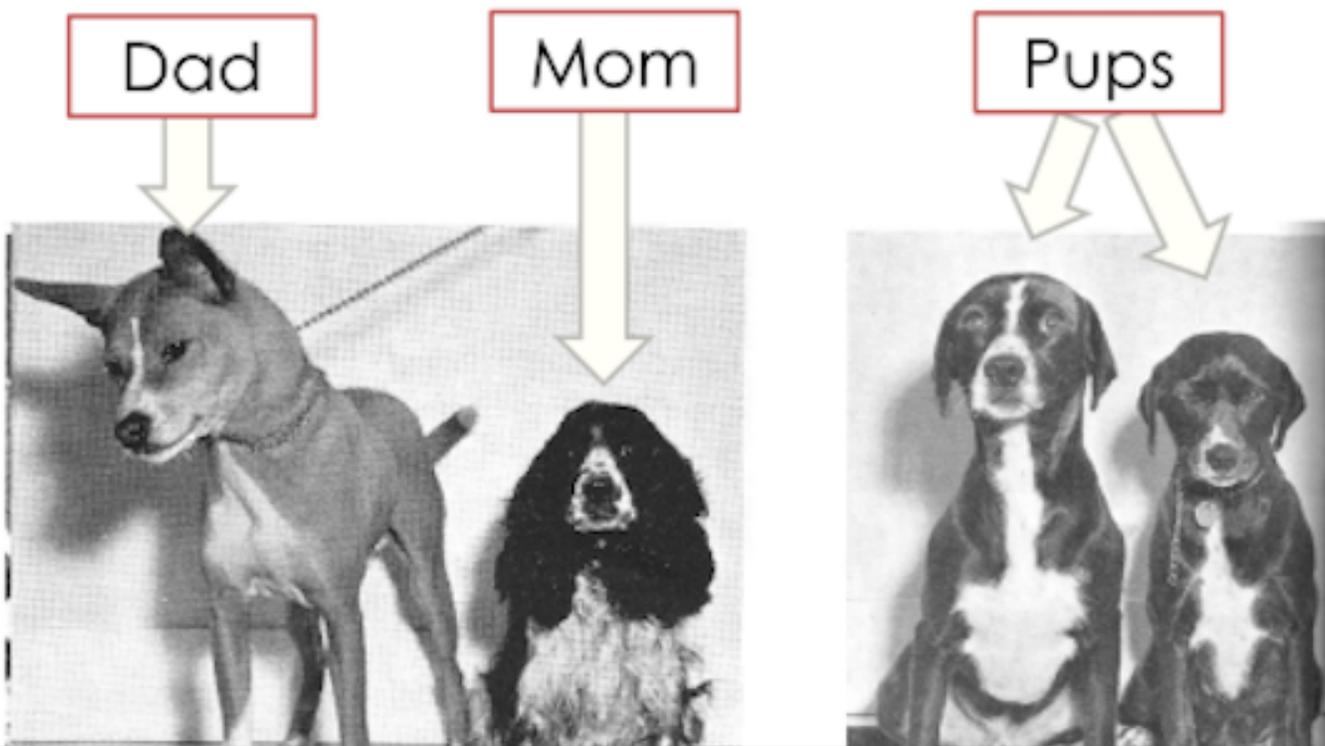
Years later, we  
have the research  
to back up Dr.  
Marder’s idea...

The March 2016 study, “What’s in a Name? Effect of Breed Perceptions and Labeling on Attractiveness, Adoptions and Length of Stay for Pit-Bull-Type Dogs” proved that breed labels on kennel cards negatively impacted the length of stay and outcomes for all dogs. 

These findings suggest that breed labeling influences potential adopters’ perceptions and their decision on whether or not to adopt a particular dog. More importantly, five additional studies proved beyond a doubt that breed labeling based on visual identification is not accurate.

Armed with this research, shelters can make an important change that will increase both the quantity and the quality of adoptions for all dogs: Remove breed labels for all dogs.





## MEET THE PARENTS

# GENETICS AND THE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF THE DOG

IN 1965, SCOTT AND FULLER PUBLISHED "GENETICS AND THE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF THE DOG", WHICH BUSTED THE VALIDITY OF VISUAL IDENTIFICATION. 📎

If the dogs pictured above on the right came into your shelter, what breed mix would you assume these two dogs are?

What assumptions would you make about how they would behave in the future?

Unlike in real life, where we often don't know the parents of the mixed breed dogs that arrive in shelters, we do know the genetic makeup of these two pups - their parents are a purebred basenji and a purebred cocker spaniel.

This photo is startling to most people because this revelation of the dogs' parentage is probably the last thing one expects based on their visual appearance. It shines a bright light on the inaccuracy of visual identification.

# RESEARCH ROUNDUP



## LINKS TO RESEARCH PROVING THE INACCURACY OF VISUAL IDENTIFICATION

<http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/research-library/visual-breed-identification-literature-review> 

<http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/ineffective-policies/visual-breed-identification> 

Five studies that specifically address visual breed identification bring into question the findings of any studies which attempt to link breed to behavior based on visually identified dogs.

These studies demonstrate the need for eliminating visual breed identification as a data source for ongoing canine behavioral studies.

**"EVENTUALLY THESE UNVERIFIED BREED LABELS END UP IN DATABASES USED IN RETROSPECTIVE RESEARCH STUDIES TO MAKE CLAIMS ABOUT CANINE BEHAVIOR."**

## COMPARISON OF VISUAL AND DNA BREED IDENTIFICATION AND INTER- OBSERVER RELIABILITY:

[http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/files/5B\\_Voith\\_AVMA\\_2009.pdf](http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/files/5B_Voith_AVMA_2009.pdf) 

### POSTER:

[http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/files/Voith\\_Poster\\_11x17.pdf](http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/files/Voith_Poster_11x17.pdf) 

This study compared adoption agencies' visual breed identifications of 20 mixed-breed dogs against DNA identification.

The results showed little agreement between reported breed (from visual identification) and actual breed as determined by DNA analysis.

**"THE DNA RESULTS ARE NOT WHAT WERE EXPECTED BASED ON THE APPEARANCE OF THE DOGS OR THE OWNERS' BELIEFS."**



# BREED LABELS NEGATIVELY IMPACT ALL SHELTER DOGS

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

### RESEARCH ON INCONSISTENT IDENTIFICATION OF "PIT BULL" DOGS BY SHELTER STAFF:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S109002331500310X>

DNA results show that shelter workers are often mistaken when they label a dog as a "pit bull" dog. According to a new University of Florida study, this can have potentially devastating consequences for the dogs.

Julie Levy, D.V.M., Ph.D., Professor of Shelter Medicine at the UF College of Veterinary Medicine and the lead author of a study published in the *Veterinary Journal*, said:

"EVEN WHEN OBSERVING THE SAME DOGS AT THE SAME TIME, SHELTER STAFF HAD ONLY MODERATE AGREEMENT WITH BREED DESIGNATIONS."

### "WHAT'S IN A NAME? EFFECT OF BREED PERCEPTIONS AND LABELING ON ATTRACTIVENESS, ADOPTIONS AND LENGTH OF STAY FOR PIT- BULL-TYPE DOGS":

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27008213>

According to research in Plos One led by Lisa Gunter of Arizona State University, shelter workers label dogs based upon information from relinquishing owners, or visual identification from shelter staff, which can greatly affect a dog's adoption chances. The study states:

" GIVEN THE COMPLEXITY OF BREED ASSIGNMENT BASED ON MORPHOLOGY COUPLED WITH NEGATIVE BREED PERCEPTIONS, REMOVING BREED LABELS IS A LOW-COST STRATEGY THAT WILL LIKELY IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR DOGS IN ANIMAL SHELTERS."

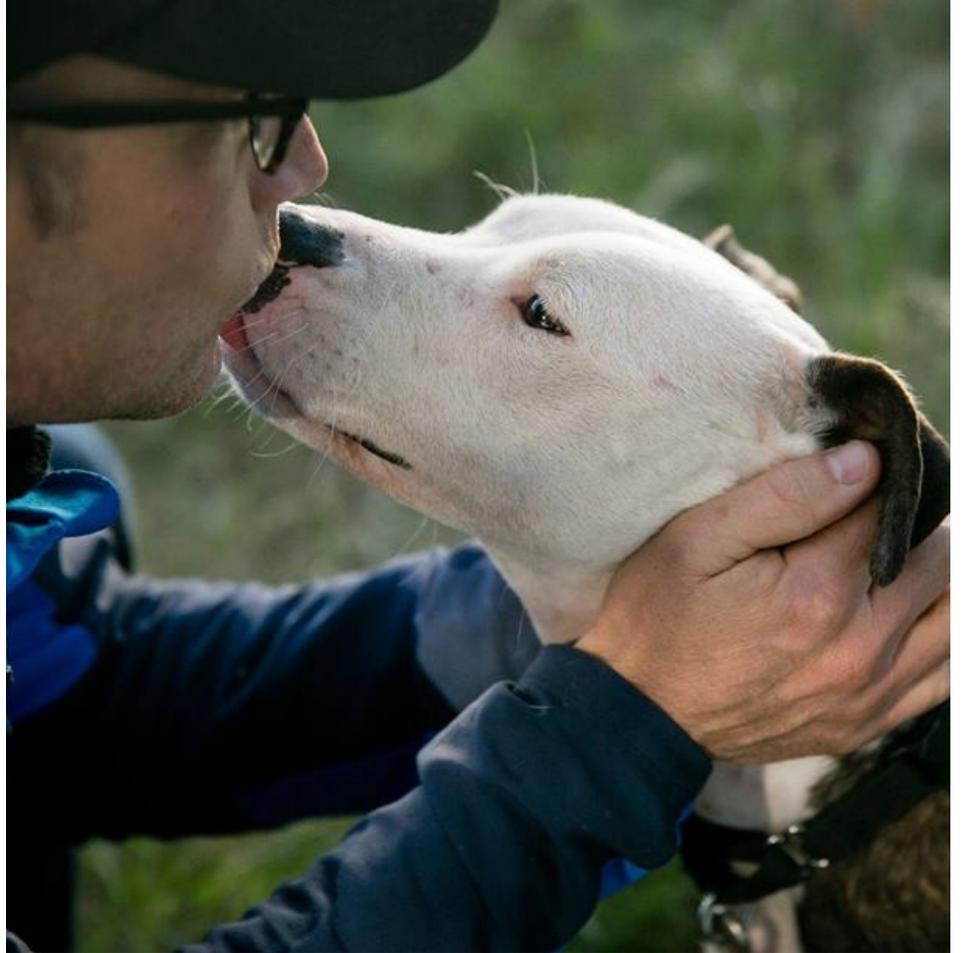
# A ROADMAP TO REMOVING BREED LABELS

Kristen Auerbach, Deputy Chief Animal Services Officer at Austin Animal Services shares her shelter's process.

We learned that no matter what the kennel card says, potential adopters, volunteers and staff will make guesses. And they're usually going to disagree with each other about those guesses.

Initially, we only removed breed labels from the kennel cards of dogs we'd identified as "pit bull" dogs. After removing those labels, we noticed an increase in people asking about the breed of a particular dog. This turned out to be a good thing. The question provides the perfect opening for a staff person or volunteer to talk about the inaccuracy of breed labeling and the importance of getting to know each dog as an individual with its own unique personality traits.

Now, we're working with our shelter software system provider to remove the breed labels from our 'adoptable' pets list so dogs will be described only with their names, ages and personality profiles.



Our journey to do away with breed labels began even earlier. Last year, we stopped referring to dogs by breed guess on our social media platforms.

We talked about the individual dog's personality, quirks, sociability with other dogs and people, but we stopped talking about breed. We did this because we know the term "pit bull" does not describe any breed of dog. It's a subjective label that means different things to different people. It has no basis in science or genetics.

In our mission to get our adopters to see the dog not the label, and in the interest

of full disclosure, the most honest thing we could do was simply say:

**"WE DON'T KNOW  
WHAT THE BREED OR  
BREED MIX IS"**

Things got a little more complicated when we stopped labeling all dogs, because we would all stand in front of a dog, and a staff member would say:

**"THAT IS A PUREBRED  
DACHSHUND" - OR  
ROTTWEILER, OR  
WHATEVER THEY  
THOUGHT IT WAS.**

# "IT SIMPLY ISN'T NECESSARY NOR IS IT HONEST FOR US TO PRESENT GUESSES OF ANY BREED AS IF THEY ARE FACT"

But, we asserted that the vast majority of dogs in our shelter are of mixed breed heritage and, unless we have indisputable proof a dog came from a breeder and has a documented pedigree, we don't know for sure.

## EVEN THEN, HOW DOES A BREED LABEL HELP A DOG GET A HOME?

People are going to make their own visual breed identification, whether it's written on a kennel card or not. It simply isn't necessary nor is it honest for us to present our guesses of any breed as if they are fact.

We're having a lot of success focusing on the dog, not the perceived breed. But each animal welfare organization has its own challenges and in some places, not labeling is impossible because of breed specific legislation or breed-based adoption restrictions.

What then?

It's up to us, as advocates, no matter what our particular situation, to explain to people that breed labels are subjective.

They are not based in science.

WHEN ANIMAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS GUESS, WE GUESS WRONG AT LEAST 50% AND EVEN 75% OF THE TIME.

We should tell people that the vast majority of dogs in our shelters are mutts or mixed breeds and that the way they look says nothing reliable about their behavior.

If you are at a shelter or rescue where putting an end to breed labeling is a possibility, you may be surprised at the immediate changes in your adoption numbers.





REFER TO THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES  
TO SEE HOW OTHER SHELTERS HAVE  
TACKLED THIS CHANGE

Orange County Animal Services:  
<https://www.animalsheltering.org/magazine/articles/whats-label>



The Humane Society of Indianapolis:  
<http://www.indystar.com/story/life/2016/05/04/wit-hout-label-more-pit-bulls-adopted/83249332/>



Dallas Animal Services:  
<https://www.facebook.com/dallasanimalservices/photos/pb.101535076582438.-2207520000.1461097264./985463288189608/?type=3&theater>



Capital Area Humane Society:  
<https://animalfarmfoundation.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/capital-area-humane-society-saving-lives-with-open-minds/>



"IT'S UP TO US, AS  
ADVOCATES, NO  
MATTER WHAT OUR  
PARTICULAR  
SITUATION, TO  
EXPLAIN TO PEOPLE  
THAT BREED LABELS  
ARE SUBJECTIVE.

THEY ARE NOT  
BASED IN SCIENCE."

- Kristen Auerbach



# TIPS ON DROPPING BREED LABELS

## **1. Stop Using Breed Labels in Social Media Posts.**

Sometimes a breed label gives followers a reason to say no and keep scrolling. Try telling a story instead. Stories help people connect with dogs they otherwise might not be drawn to.

## **2. Remove Breed Labels from Your Kennel Cards.**

Make sure volunteers and staff know how to chat with potential adopters without referring to breeds.

## **3. Ask Your Shelter Software Provider to Remove Breed Labels.**

While many software companies are adding "unknown" and "mixed breed" options, there are many that do not. We've got tips on how

to approach this in the following section.

## **4. Role Play with Staff and Volunteers about How to Respond to Breed Inquiries.**

Remember the truth works. Tell people if you don't know a dog's breed. Let them know if the majority of your dogs are a mixed breed of unknown origin. Make sure they know that labels based on guesswork are extremely inaccurate.

## **5. Challenge Yourself and Your Colleagues to Find Non-Breed Descriptors for Dogs.**

It's human nature to put things into categories. Most of us label dogs by breed, especially if it's for a functional reason - like asking someone to, "Go adopt that Maltese." Find other ways to describe a dog - like "Go adopt that fluffy, white fuzzball wagging her tail."



# KENNEL CARD EXAMPLE

HI MY NAME IS

## Marshmallow



Marshmallow recently spent the day working in our office with staff members who shared this report, "We believe Marshmallow would make an excellent administrative assistant. While his spreadsheet skills leave something to be desired, he brings a lot to the table in other ways, such as his natural curiosity and endless enthusiasm for sitting on office furniture. This young man loves belly rubs, runs at the speed of light (which will come in handy if you need to send him on a coffee run) and can keep even the toughest of clients entertained with his ability to remove treats out of mid air. We're pleased to say he is also a great team player, getting along well with other dogs, even letting them catch up to him in the yard from time to time. Any organization, er, family, would be lucky to have him." Hire Marshmallow as your new BFF today!

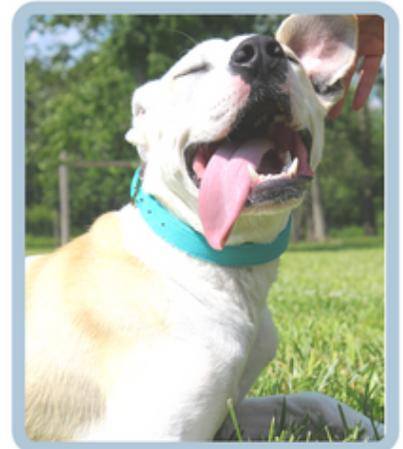
*Marshmallow walks on a leash like a rock star!*

Kennel Number: E17  
Age: 3  
Status: Available

Animal Number:  
027391873  
Weight: 47 lb

Walks best with: A flat collar  
Favorite toys: Tennis ball  
Favorite scratch spot: My belly  
Favorite enrichment: Busy boxes

Medical: Marshmallow is currently on medication for an ear infection.



**MAKE A COPY OF THIS DESIGN AND EDIT IT  
TO FIT YOUR ORGANIZATION.** 

# KENNEL CARD EXAMPLE

## Austin Animal Center

### Austin Animal Center Report Card

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Championed by: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Academics *So far, I know:*

Sit      Stay      Come      Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Shake   Drop it      Down      \_\_\_\_\_

#### Recess *I seem to enjoy:*

Walking with a \_\_\_\_\_  
(Equipment)

Playgroups      Swimming  
or playing in water      Car Rides

Agility      Fetch      Toys/Puzzles

#### Qualities *Staff & Volunteers say I'm:*

Goofy      Cuddly      Outgoing  
Adventurous      Sweet      Independent  
Calm/Gentle      Shy      Playful

### Enrichment and Equipment items

I Love	
	Kongs
	Kong Wobblers
	Bully Sticks/Rawhides
	Nylabones
	Twist n' Treats
	Kibble Nibbles
Do Not Give Me	
	Kongs
	Rubber Treat Puzzles
	Hard Plastic Treat Puzzles
	Hard Bones
	Large Rawhides
	Fluffy Blankets
	Plush Toys
Equipment Needs	
	Easy Walk Harness
	Gentle Leader
	Martingale

GET A PRINTER FRIENDLY VERSION OF  
AUSTIN ANIMAL CENTER'S KENNEL CARDS.



# ROLEPLAYING QUESTIONS

## PREPARE YOUR SHELTER STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS FOR ANY QUESTIONS FROM POTENTIAL ADOPTERS

By: Samantha Miller, Behavior Manager  
Capital Area Humane Society

**Q: "Do you have any idea what mix this dog is?"**

**A:** "We have given up on guessing the breeds of the dogs. We are wrong most of the time anyway."

- or -

"We aren't in the business of guessing breeds, especially since it doesn't tell us anything about a dog's personality. We want to be as honest as possible with our adopters. What are some qualities that you are looking for in your new companion?"

**Q. "You don't have any idea? Can't you just tell me what you think he is?"**

A. "No, we don't. Your guess is as good as ours and we will probably both be wrong! We do know that he lived well with cats and loves to use his stuffed bear as a pillow."

**Q: "It looks like he has some hound (or whatever their breed guess is) in him and I don't want a hound"**

**A:** "Actually, visual identification of a dog is highly inaccurate. We are wrong about 75% of the time. What characteristics are you looking for in a dog?"



# WORKING WITH SHELTER SOFTWARE COMPANIES



Once you've removed breed labels from social media and kennel cards, and have trained staff to accurately answer questions, there's one last hurdle:

Shelter software that requires you to select a predominate breed - regardless of whether or not you have any information on the breed.

That's why catch-all phrases like 'pit bull mix' or 'lab mix' often pop up in adoption records.

The good news is that many shelter software companies are catching on to the negative impact inaccurate labels have on dogs. Some software now has "mixed breed" and "unknown" options. This prevents shelter staff from labeling a dog based on potentially erroneous guesswork.

But, this isn't the norm. If your current system doesn't have these options, here's something you can do to encourage change for the future:

Contact your shelter software system company and ask them to add a "mixed" or "unknown" breed label as a predominate identifier.

They may advise against this option, but that doesn't mean they can't or won't do it.

Be persistent and explain the science and studies that back up your request.

The template on the next page is a great guide for how to approach these companies.





# SHELTER SOFTWARE LETTER REQUEST TEMPLATE

Dear [Name],

My name is [Name] with [Organization Name]. We request the addition of two predominate breed identifiers to our software service with your company: Mixed and Unknown.

We are in the process of removing breed labels from our shelter. We require this change to complete our mission to treat all dogs as individuals. The option to label dogs “mixed” or “unknown” lets us speak honestly and accurately about what we know about the dogs in our shelter. The overwhelming majority of the dogs in our care are of mixed and unknown backgrounds.

We are not alone in this. Research shows that the majority of dogs in shelters are mixed breed and that animal experts are incapable of accurately identifying breeds by visual inspection alone.

Your system currently requires us to make a guess that we know will likely be wrong. Staff and adopters make assumptions about dogs based on these inaccurate labels. These assumptions can carry real consequences for dogs and, in some cases, their families.

We are aware of the challenges removing breed labels present, but we are resolute in our decision. Providing the “mixed” and “unknown” breed label options lets our organization save more lives, do better quality work, and be accurate and honest in our communications with the public.

Please contact us at your earliest convenience, so we can discuss this change in our service.

Sincerely,

[Name]



# SHELTER SOFTWARE OPTIONS



## SHELTER LUV

Shelter Luv does not require breed labels and offers “mixed breed – small, medium, or large” categories.

## PET POINT

Pet Point has a “mixed breed” option for a primary breed identifier.



## CHAMELEON

Upon request, Chameleon will offer “mixed breed” as a primary breed identifier.



# MORE SHELTER SOFTWARE OPTIONS



## ANIMAL SHELTER MANAGER

This software goes the extra step and lets shelters add their own breed names to the breed drop down menu.

## SHELTER BUDDY

If you request it, Shelter Buddy, will offer "unknown" or "mixed breed" options.



*\*This information is current as of September 2016. \*Note this is subject to change and organizations should contact these companies directly for current information.*

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BREED LABELS

We know you've been thinking this the entire time - "Isn't it wrong to not tell adopters about a dog's breed traits? Isn't that holding back information they need?"

First, we're not denying that breeds and breed traits exist. They do. But unless we view a dog as an individual, we won't know which traits are actually there.

How breed traits present themselves in dogs varies tremendously, particularly in mixed breed dogs of unknown origins, which happen to be the majority of dogs found in shelter systems.

That's why a guess at how a breed trait may or may not manifest itself is not nearly as reliable

## DON'T WE NEED TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT BREED TRAITS?

as the information shelters gather by observing the dogs in their care. If you observe breed traits, share them with the adopter. If you don't observe them, don't assume they are there.

And you can't apply breed traits to the "mixed breed" label. Mixed breed dogs are not any breed of dog at all. There are no "mixed breed traits."

Purebred dogs are bred from closed gene pools. Mixed breed dogs are not from closed or coherent gene pools and cannot be considered a member of any breed. They have more in common genetically with ALL dogs, than any one breed in particular.

And remember that breed is just one part of any individual dog. Even purebred dogs are individuals. Breed traits don't always present themselves in purebred dogs.

You can't discount their socialization, training, genetics, environment, etc.

Traits related to breed are not the whole dog. Breed traits are just one component of a dog's personality and behavior.

When we give equal or more weight to breed traits rather than focusing on what we've observed about a dog's individual needs, we can hinder their chances at a successful match.

To truly understand a dog, you need to look past the breed and see it as an individual.





# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **What is the difference between “mixed breed” and “unknown,” and which is better?**

Use "unknown breed" when you do not know the pedigree of a dog and can only make a guess at breed based on visual inspection. "Unknown breed" is more accurate because it encompasses all dogs - both mixed breed and purebred.

## **Will adopters think we're trying to pass off “pit bull” dogs as other breeds and stop trusting us?**

Honesty is the best policy. Almost every dog you meet in shelters is more than one breed. Research says that visual identification of mixed breed dogs is highly inaccurate.

Unless you know what a dog's breed mix is for sure, you know the parents or have paperwork, speculating about the possible breed mix is that - speculation. It's not fact and it's more than likely an incorrect assumption.

To be completely honest with your adopters, tell them the truth: You aren't sure what the breed mix might be. Anything could be possible. What's really important is that you tell them what you know about the dog's actual behavior based on your observations and evaluations.

## **What if the animal really looks like a purebred or has certain breed features? What should we say if adopters ask us about this?**

If you don't have a documented pedigree, simply say: "This dog may or may not be a purebred Poodle. Here's what we've observed about his behavior..."

If the adopters notice physical markings or certain behaviors that lead them to believe a dog might be a certain breed (for example: a black mark on the dog's tongue has them guessing he might be a chow mix), be honest and acknowledge that it is a possibility.

# STILL HAVE QUESTIONS? WE'VE GOT MORE ANSWERS

Here's an example of how you might respond to that:

"Yes, it is possible this dog might have some chow in there, though we don't know for sure. It could just be a birthmark."

## **What about housing restrictions or BSL?**

If you're concerned about someone else such as a landlord, an insurance company, or Animal Control identifying the dog as a restricted breed, let the adopters know this is a possibility and determine how that may affect them legally.

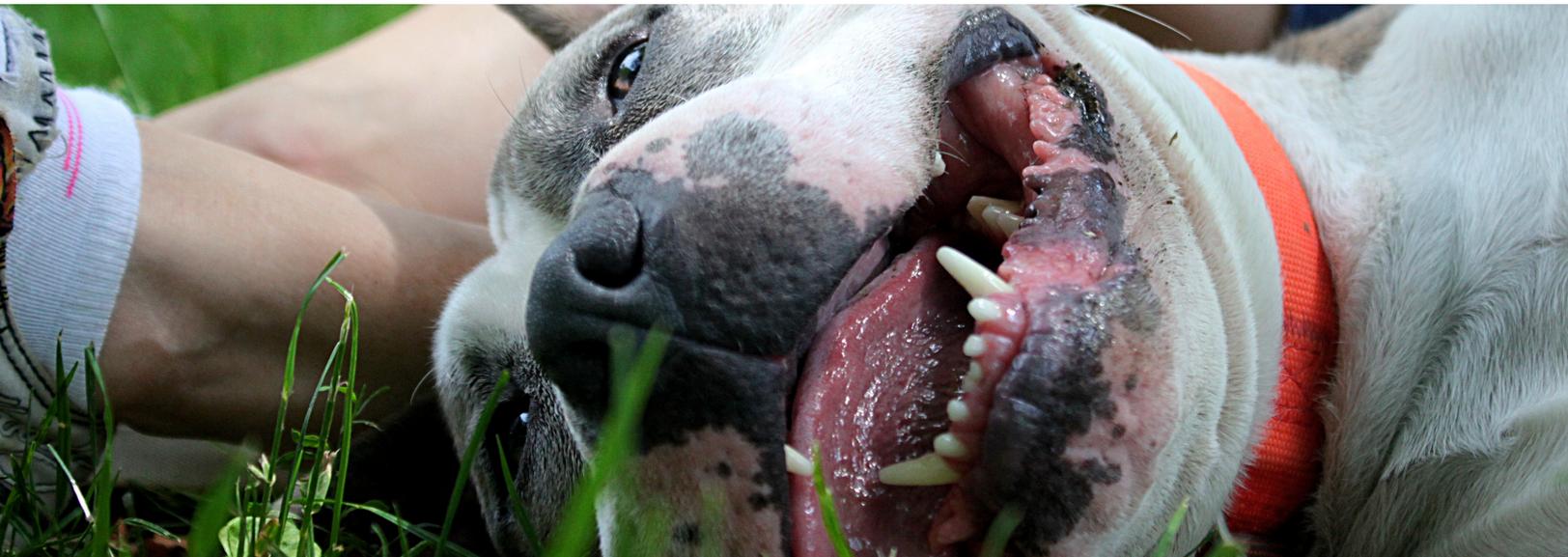
Be aware of any potential breed restrictions in your community and give resources to educate your adopters about these realities.

The goal is honest, accurate information that helps adopters make the best choice for their family, housing situation, and community.

Longmont Humane Society, which is located near Denver, Colorado (a city with BSL), states this on some of their dogs' profiles:

"Due to my physical appearance, I may experience discrimination and be unable to live in a city with Breed Specific Legislation."

Remember: our goal is to provide MORE information, not withhold it, and to be accurate in all of our communications.



# FAQ

## **Lots of the dogs we see have the characteristics of certain breeds, so shouldn't we identify them that way?**

If all you have is a visual inspection and no pedigree, then you're guessing at a dog's breed or breed mix.

You can label the dogs however you choose, but be careful not to make behavioral predictions based on this guess. Don't imply to adopters that a label accurately indicates anything about a dog's suitability for adoption or what kind of home he needs.

## **REMEMBER, PEOPLE ARE ADOPTING A DOG, NOT A BREED.**

How that dog behaves is the key to a good match for potential adopters.

## **Should we DNA test the dogs in our shelter to find out what they are?**

We don't recommend that shelters DNA test their dogs. Dog behavior is a complex mix of nature and nurture. Knowing a dog's DNA is only one piece of the puzzle. It's another tool in the toolbox.

Shelters are in the business of adopting out companion animals. The only way to know if a dog is going to be a good companion is to get to know that individual dog.



Shelters are better off spending their time and money getting to know the dogs in their care, rather than paying for DNA tests.

## **We've changed how we label the dogs on our kennel cards and website, but what do we do about software companies that require a predominant breed identifier?**

You may be forced to pick a primary breed in shelter software and aggregators, but you can make other notes on a dog's profile explaining that this is just a guess.

We recommend this language:

*"This software requires that we choose a predominant breed or breed mix for our dogs. Visual breed identification is unreliable, so for most of the dogs we are only guessing at predominant breed or breed mix. We get to know each dog as an individual and will do our best to describe each of our dogs based on personality, not by breed label."*

As shelter software companies continue to make progress on this issue, it is critical that the aggregators also look to improve their services by offering a range of options.

# FAQ

These options include “mixed” or “unknown” and allowing the public to search by personality traits and other pet qualities.

## **Should we label all “pit bull” dogs as mixed breed?**

No, strive for accuracy. The majority of shelter dogs have unknown origins, so be honest about all the dogs in your shelter, not just the ones you perceive to be “pit bull” dogs. Don't label a dog if you don't have purebred papers for it - no matter what the dog looks like. If you have papers that state a dog is an American pit bull terrier, then share that information.

## **Doesn't breed labeling 'help' desirable breeds find homes?**

Research shows that ALL dogs benefit when breed labels are removed. This helps potential adopters focus on the individual dog's pet qualities to determine if they are right for their family's lifestyle.

## **We take lost and found reports at our shelter. Does getting better at breed identification improve lost and found reporting? Do “mixed” and “unknown” labels interfere with reuniting owners and dogs?**

Focusing on identifying breed and breed mixes is not the best way to reunite owners to lost pets. No matter how good you

breeds, you still might guess wrong or the owner might label them differently than you do.

Dr Julie Levy of Maddies' Fund agrees. In this interview with Vetstreet she says:

*“A lot of times, lost and found searches are based on breed, so an owner might come in [to a shelter] and describe their missing dog as a Lab mix, but the shelter might've recorded that black dog as a Pit Bull mix or a Shepherd mix. If the search is done purely by breed, they might not match at all, even though that dog is at the shelter or described in a found poster.”*

The more accurate approach is to focus on the physical description of the dog: color, weight, identifying characteristics, where the dog was found, etc.

Owners who believe their dog matches that physical description should then visit the shelter to identify them in person.

We recommend taking photos of all found dogs and posting them online, either on your website or on social media.

## **Our shelter works with purebred rescue groups. Don't we need to get better at breed identification, so we can send them dogs?**

No, you don't need to get better at guessing breeds. A simple photograph of the dog in question, emailed to the rescue group, will help them decide if

the dog is one they're interested in helping.

If they choose to meet the dog, it's based on the photo you sent them and their opinion of the dog's breed. They're the experts on the breed they work with. Let them make up their minds based on photos, or better yet, a video.

## **What are some other ways that inaccurate breed labels harm dogs?**

When dogs are labeled in shelters, veterinary clinics, and animal control licensing, these guesses make their way into official and academic reports and data that influences how we view and regulate different “breeds” of dogs.

Because breed guesses are highly inaccurate, the data pertaining to breed identification is highly questionable. Despite this scientifically proven fact, insurance companies, the media, housing associations, and others still solicit this data. This means that people are creating policies and laws based on inaccurate, flawed, and incomplete data.



# OTHER RESOURCES

## FOR REMOVING BREED LABELS

**Maddies Fund Removing Breed Labels**

**Webinar:**

Coming soon



**Breed Labels: When Guesses Turn Into Predictions:**

<https://animalfarmfoundation.wordpress.com/2016/02/08/breed-labels-when-guesses-turn-into-predictions/>



**More Animal Shelters Remove Breed Labels: Is Software Catching Up?**

<https://animalfarmfoundation.wordpress.com/2016/04/19/breed-labels-software/>



**Removing Breed Labels: Easier Than You Think:**

<https://animalfarmfoundation.wordpress.com/2015/06/15/removing-breed-labels-easier-than-you-think/>



**Canine Identity Crisis - Breed Labeling Affects Adoption:**

<http://www.maddiesfund.org/canine-identity-crisis-breed-labeling-affects-adoption-part-1.htm>



**For more information, please visit our website:**

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